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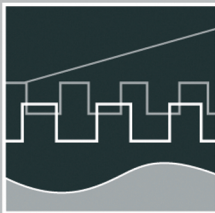
Internationales Wissenschaftliches Kolloquium
International Scientific Colloquium



PROCEEDINGS

| 10 - 13 September 2007

FACULTY OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND AUTOMATION



COMPUTER SCIENCE MEETS AUTOMATION

VOLUME I

Session 1 - Systems Engineering and Intelligent Systems

Session 2 - Advances in Control Theory and Control Engineering

**Session 3 - Optimisation and Management of Complex
Systems and Networked Systems**

Session 4 - Intelligent Vehicles and Mobile Systems

Session 5 - Robotics and Motion Systems



Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

ISBN 978-3-939473-17-6

Impressum

- Herausgeber: Der Rektor der Technischen Universität Ilmenau
Univ.-Prof. Dr. rer. nat. habil. Peter Scharff
- Redaktion: Referat Marketing und Studentische Angelegenheiten
Kongressorganisation
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- Redaktionsschluss: Juli 2007
- Verlag: 
Technische Universität Ilmenau/Universitätsbibliothek
Universitätsverlag Ilmenau
Postfach 10 05 65
98684 Ilmenau
www.tu-ilmenau.de/universitaetsverlag
- Herstellung und Auslieferung: Verlagshaus Monsenstein und Vannerdat OHG
Am Hawerkamp 31
48155 Münster
www.mv-verlag.de
- Layout Cover: www.cey-x.de
- Bezugsmöglichkeiten: Universitätsbibliothek der TU Ilmenau
Tel.: +49 3677 69-4615
Fax: +49 3677 69-4602

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Preface

Dear Participants,

Confronted with the ever-increasing complexity of technical processes and the growing demands on their efficiency, security and flexibility, the scientific world needs to establish new methods of engineering design and new methods of systems operation. The factors likely to affect the design of the smart systems of the future will doubtless include the following:

- As computational costs decrease, it will be possible to apply more complex algorithms, even in real time. These algorithms will take into account system nonlinearities or provide online optimisation of the system's performance.
- New fields of application will be addressed. Interest is now being expressed, beyond that in "classical" technical systems and processes, in environmental systems or medical and bioengineering applications.
- The boundaries between software and hardware design are being eroded. New design methods will include co-design of software and hardware and even of sensor and actuator components.
- Automation will not only replace human operators but will assist, support and supervise humans so that their work is safe and even more effective.
- Networked systems or swarms will be crucial, requiring improvement of the communication within them and study of how their behaviour can be made globally consistent.
- The issues of security and safety, not only during the operation of systems but also in the course of their design, will continue to increase in importance.

The title "Computer Science meets Automation", borne by the 52nd International Scientific Colloquium (IWK) at the Technische Universität Ilmenau, Germany, expresses the desire of scientists and engineers to rise to these challenges, cooperating closely on innovative methods in the two disciplines of computer science and automation.

The IWK has a long tradition going back as far as 1953. In the years before 1989, a major function of the colloquium was to bring together scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Naturally, bonds were also deepened between the countries from the East. Today, the objective of the colloquium is still to bring researchers together. They come from the eastern and western member states of the European Union, and, indeed, from all over the world. All who wish to share their ideas on the points where "Computer Science meets Automation" are addressed by this colloquium at the Technische Universität Ilmenau.


All the University's Faculties have joined forces to ensure that nothing is left out. Control engineering, information science, cybernetics, communication technology and systems engineering – for all of these and their applications (ranging from biological systems to heavy engineering), the issues are being covered.

Together with all the organizers I should like to thank you for your contributions to the conference, ensuring, as they do, a most interesting colloquium programme of an interdisciplinary nature.

I am looking forward to an inspiring colloquium. It promises to be a fine platform for you to present your research, to address new concepts and to meet colleagues in Ilmenau.



Professor Peter Scharff
Rector, TU Ilmenau



Professor Christoph Ament
Head of Organisation

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Appearance-based Visual Localisation in Outdoor Environments with an Omnidirectional Camera

1 Introduction

After achieving many goals in indoor robot navigation the focus of research is shifting to outdoor applications. This poses a new challenge since outdoor environments do not only lack the presence of mainly straight and close in range walls as can be found in indoor office environments but also come up with more dynamic lighting conditions. Thus localising the robot in its environment becomes a greater challenge. On the other hand robots can have the advantage of an additional sensory input - the Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver - which measures a global position of the robot and is not applicable indoors. Though it has a bounded error, the GPS position estimate can not be exclusively used for robot localisation since it is prone to jumps in precision and might include an offset over longer periods of time because of multipath reflections from buildings or trees. Therefore we use a visual localisation system which was made robust to changes in illumination and sensor occlusion. Our robot platform is a three-wheeled vehicle equipped with an omnidirectional camera as well as a low-cost GPS receiver, a laser range finder, sonar sensors and an inertial odometry measurement unit (see Figure 2(a)).

2 Related Work

This section provides a brief review of the literature in visual outdoor localisation. The proposed approaches can be divided into ones dealing with relative localization and ones dealing with absolute localisation. Relative localisation means deriving the current pose of the robot from the previous one by measuring or estimating the relative pose change. Optical flow techniques on monocular images have the drawback of a flat world assumption in order to get reliable movement estimations [5]. This is overcome by 3D pose estimation from tracking features (e.g. corners) in an image stream [14]. Since such a calculation needs a lot of computational power and moreover requires the camera platform to be in motion, the current focus of research in those so-called visual odometry techniques is the tracking of 3D points derived from stereo camera images. Candidate points can be found by corners [14] or SIFT features [2]. The other group of approaches deals with absolute localisation which means deriving the robots current pose from a topological visual map. Such a map consists of reference locations at which low dimensional features from belonging reference images are stored. Colour histograms are used as feature vectors describing the

colour distribution in the image and are combined with nearest neighbour searches to derive the possible location of the query image [3]. The image pixel intensity gradients pose a feature which is robust to illumination changes [4]. Local image structure is also examined by integral invariant features [16] or SIFT features [17], [16]. Features that go towards object recognition are region based object classification [12] and edges of buildings [7]. Simultaneous Localisation and Mapping (SLAM) in the visual domain in large scale outdoor environments is yet tackled by only a few approaches. Pose estimation by means of a stereo camera and loop closing detection with the help of gradient features is done in [11] to solve the SLAM problem. Separate loop closing detection using SIFT features is done in [13]. Another SLAM approach is the application of a relaxation algorithm on the topological map based on image feature and odometry relations [1]. The visual odometry techniques for relative robot localisation have the advantage to be independent from a map and can therefore localise the robot immediately. Their drawback is the fact that they have no global reference and thus accumulate the estimation error. By contrast using a visual map provides this global framework. Such a map has to be build beforehand which is not always possible though. SLAM approaches are meant to solve this drawback and are therefore a promising future technique for visual outdoor localisation.

3 Approach

We propose the use of appearance-based features from panoramic images in combination with a probabilistic framework as a solution to the localisation problem. The full localisation process consists of two phases, a mapping phase and a localisation phase, which are lined out below.

First, in the mapping phase, a topological map of visual representations of the environment is built by manually acquiring the image data of the environment in conjunction with the associated pose $\underline{x} = (x, y, \varphi)$ of the robot. This kind of map stores the information in a few distinct reference places, which is especially useful in large outdoor environments. The uncertainty in position of the robot caused by erroneous odometry information is integrated out by means of a Bayesian filter [6] combining the odometry information and the GPS measurements. For further details see [15]. The mapping process presented in this work still utilises the GPS sensor despite its mentioned shortcomings. This is due to ongoing research in this field. The accuracy of acquired maps therefore has to be judged by a human inspector. Inappropriate maps possibly have to be rejected and acquired again.

For fast and noise-reduced computation the image data is stored as low dimensional representations. At this point the use of the omnidirectional camera has the advantage that only one image per reference position is needed to gather visual information from all view directions. Several test runs showed that structure-based image features are the best choice

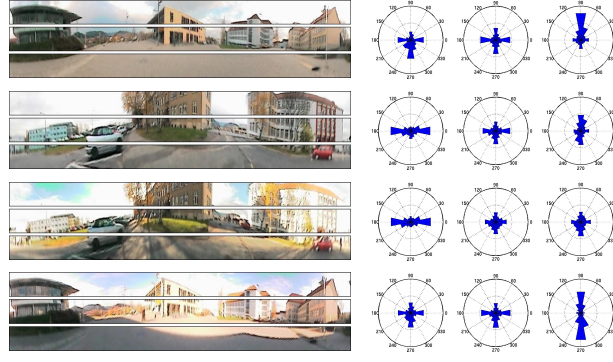


Figure 1: Two omnidirectional scenes of the campus divided into three horizontal segments and the corresponding 16-bin gradient orientation histograms left to right for the top to bottom segments.

considering invariance to different illumination settings and general capability to distinguish adjacent as well as relocate mapped places. Hence we decided to use the gradient orientation histogram as image feature for our purpose. To calculate the feature vector first the

omnidirectional image is converted into a panoramic image. Of that panoramic image the approximate first order gradients G_x , G_y are calculated from the pixel intensities by means of Sobel edge filtering. Each pixel contributes to the histogram by its gradient orientation. We found a number of 16 orientation classes to give the best results. To overcome the need of a threshold for very low gradients they are weighted by their magnitude $M = \sqrt{G_x^2 + G_y^2}$ as in [10]. For the feature vector \underline{h} to be more distinctive several histograms are computed from horizontal image segments (see Figure 1) and concatenated. We found a number of six segments to give the best results. Two feature vectors m and n are compared by calculating the statistical χ^2 distances

$$d_{\chi^2}^{(i)}(\underline{m}^{(i)}, \underline{n}^{(i)}) = \sum_{k=1}^b \frac{(\underline{m}_k^{(i)} - \underline{n}_k^{(i)})^2}{(\underline{m}_k^{(i)} + \underline{n}_k^{(i)})} \quad (1)$$

for all segment histograms indexed by i with b histogram bins. In order to be robust to partial image occlusions by e.g. persons, only the three smallest distances $d_{\chi^2}^{(i)}$ are summed up to the overall distance d_{χ^2} .

In the localisation phase the robot needs to estimate its pose \underline{x} by comparing the current visual sensory input with the acquired map. The visual localisation algorithm applies a Bayesian filter variant, namely a standard Monte-Carlo-Localisation (MCL) method [6], for estimating the robots pose via the current sensor input of the camera. This is accomplished by approximating the probability distribution of the pose by a number of discrete samples. Each of those samples is moved by a motion model derived from the robot vehicle dynamics given the last movement of the robot. To adapt the distribution according to the sensor input, for every sample the closest reference feature vector \underline{h}_r at the samples position in the map is compared to the feature vector \underline{h}_c calculated of the current sensor input. In the resampling step samples whose distance $d_{\chi^2}(\underline{h}_r, \underline{h}_c)$ is small are more likely to be kept and

duplicated as opposed to the remaining ones which are likely to be erased. Eventually the pose estimation is calculated as the mean of the pose distribution of all samples.

4 Results

To examine the performance of our localisation system we measured the precision at measuring points arranged as markers at known positions on the ground. Their relative positions were determined by tape measure and best fitted to the GPS measurements. Two places on the campus of the TU Ilmenau with an area of 60 m×18 m and 90 m×35 m (see Fig. 2(b)) were investigated. First a topological visual map was build at each of those two places on a sunny as well as a cloudy day. We found a minimum distance of the maps reference points of 2 m to be sufficient. Also in each of the four cases a test run of about 1.5 km length was performed which included several loops. In those test runs we did not stick to the paths used in the mapping stage, but arbitrarily passed the measuring points. At those points we were able to calculate the localisation error. Since our robot is not equipped with a compass we used the GPS as best available ground truth for the robots heading direction. The robots pose was estimated for all pairs of test runs and maps at each place. The results are lined out in table 1.

Test run	Map	Position				Heading			
		Place A		Place B		Place A		Place B	
		μ	σ	μ	σ	μ	σ	μ	σ
sunny	sunny	2.77	1.62	3.14	1.73	18.07	14.29	10.30	7.55
cloudy	cloudy	3.48	1.77	3.62	2.45	13.79	10.86	12.40	9.57
sunny	cloudy	3.86	2.77	3.95	2.29	20.60	15.28	12.11	9.11
cloudy	sunny	3.65	3.24	4.43	2.56	14.92	13.04	12.35	12.47

Table 1: Mean difference and standard deviation of the position estimation in meters and the heading direction estimation in degrees.

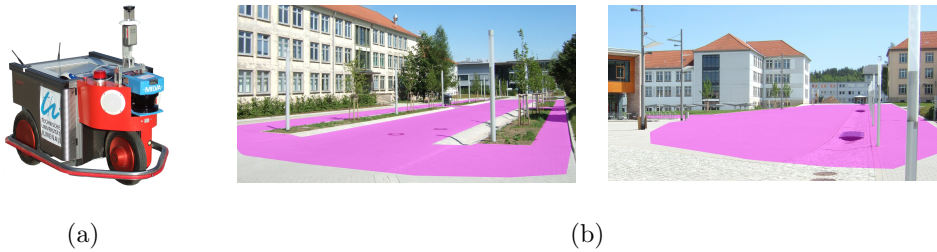


Figure 2: (a) The outdoor robot MILVA. (b) Places A and B on the campus of the TU Ilmenau where the performance examinations were carried out (magenta regions).

The results show that there is no big difference in estimation precision between the test runs performed on maps with equal illumination conditions and those with different conditions.

This means the localisation system is robust to changing environment illumination caused by different day times and weather situations. The gradient orientation histogram is robust up to 50% of image occlusion. The GPS/odometry integration achieved a mean position estimation error of 2.54 m and a mean heading direction estimation error of 10.89 degrees. Figure 3 shows estimated trajectories of the visual MCL and the GPS/odometry integration.

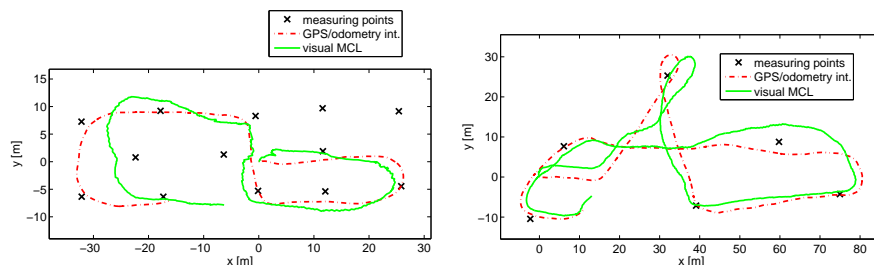


Figure 3: Parts of the estimated trajectories of the visual MCL and the GPS/odometry integration.

5 Conclusion

We presented a visual localisation framework able to localise our robot on the campus of the TU Ilmenau. It is robust to changes in environment illumination and image occlusions. At the moment its localisation precision is lower than the one of the GPS system used for map building. Considering the precision of the visual system is only as good as the map it relies on, the results are promising though. Moreover has the visual localisation the advantage that the map serves as a stable observation reference, with extreme image distortions causing only a temporal uncertainty of all particles which would shift the belief to the odometry. By contrast jumps in the GPS data which are possible for a longer period of time cause the pose estimation to drift to the erroneous measurements. This especially bears problems in the context of robot navigation. As mentioned above for map building this way of pose estimation is still useful since maps with extreme pose outliers can be identified manually after the mapping process and reacquired. Future investigations will have to tackle a gain in heading direction estimation precision which is likely to improve the overall performance as well.

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